



Issue Brief: Progress on Arroyos and Open Space Plan

SUMMARY

Development Services has completed an arroyo inventory, which will be presented to Council on Tuesday January 24th. The inventory identifies possible candidates for preservation as natural areas or parks. There are 285 arroyos to choose from. Staff reviewed several schemes for selecting specific properties before concluding that broader public input was a necessity. Planners realized that assessing community values is the key to finding what areas will have the highest worth to the public.

It also became clear that natural open space is not restricted to the arroyos around the Franklin Mountains. All parts of the City have areas the community values. Rivers and canals, wildflower meadows, walking and biking trails or desert dunes may also need to be preserved for future generations. Consequently, the planners are seeking to broaden the scope of the process to look at natural areas other than arroyos. Staff will recommend to Council on Tuesday that the City hire a consultant to undertake a comprehensive community open-space planning process for each planning area of the City of El Paso.

Two further recommendations will be given. One is that the Open Space Plan process starts by addressing arroyos in established neighborhoods. The other is that a resolution be passed jointly with the Public Service Board stating that no PSB land with arroyos will be sold without a Land Study showing the proposed disposition of the arroyos. The resolution would sunset when the Open Space Plan for PSB areas is completed.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

http://www.elpasotexas.gov/planning/open_space.asp

Number and area

Two hundred eighty five arroyos were inventoried for a total area of 8910 acres (nearly 14 square miles). The total length of ephemeral stream beds counted was approximately 175 miles.

Public vs Private Ownership

Of the arroyos in the inventory, slightly more area is under private ownership than is owned by the City of El Paso. However if State land (GLO) and Federal land in Castner Range is included, private land is less than half the total area.

Total Area	City of El Paso	Federal	State of Texas	Private Owners
8910	3704	1074	271	3861
100%	41.5 %	12.1%	3.0%	43.4%

Zoning, Mountain Development Area

All land within the City limits is within some zoning district. Land in Castner Range is not zoned. Just over 50% of the land in the arroyo inventory is zoned R-3. Another 28 percent is within the Planned Mountain Development area.

Zoning District	Total Acres	Percent
A-2	121.79	1.55%
A-3	7.58	0.10%
A-O	28.50	0.36%
C-1	53.06	0.68%
C-2	6.46	0.08%
C-3	87.16	1.11%
C-4	158.11	2.02%
M-1	154.26	1.97%
M-2	0.21	0.00%
M-3	147.13	1.88%
P-C	0.92	0.01%
P-R 1	123.27	1.57%
P-R 2	113.04	1.44%
PMD	2193.92	27.99%
R-2	12.07	0.15%
R-3	3978.19	50.75%
R-3A	368.66	4.70%
R-4	28.55	0.36%
R-5	10.5	0.01%
R-F	245.0	3.1%

Eighty-five arroyos have at least one acre covered by an approved subdivision plat, adding up to 590 acres or 6 percent of the total. Some of this land is not slated for development, as it was platted as a park (Arroyo Park) or as common open space for a homeowners association.

One hundred twenty three arroyos have at least some portion within the mountain development area (MDA.) Total acreage of arroyos in the MDA is 3127. MDA is not the same as PMD zoning; the zoning can be changed by application to City Council, whereas the MDA was designated by metes and bounds in a separate ordinance. The MDA imposes certain standards on subdivision development, including preservation of “watercourses” carrying more than 5 cubic feet per second in a 100-year storm. Flood zones must also be preserved.

State Park and Trails

Recreational trails crisscross the area below the mountains. These trails are on City or private property. Ninety-two of the arroyos in the inventory have trails on some part of them. Many arroyos in the undeveloped areas or very close to the mountain form a direct corridor to the Franklin Mountains State Park. If a direct corridor is defined as an arroyo having no paved road or developed area between it and the park boundary, one hundred eight arroyos meet this criterion. Some of these connect to another arroyo before reaching the park, but no man made obstruction is present.